

Nixon-LBJ Cooperation a Surprise

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and Jack Anderson

Considering the fact the two men have been on opposite sides of the political fence all their lives, President Johnson and President-elect Nixon got along surprisingly well during last week's historic luncheon.

There has been no other case in half a century when a President and President-elect have sat down together and discussed their mutual problems so carefully and in such a friendly atmosphere.

No love was lost between Presidents Truman and Eisenhower when the latter took over in 1953. They did not confer. In fact, Mr. Eisenhower would not even get out of his car when he drove up to the White House to escort Mr. Truman to the Capitol for the inaugural ceremony.

There was one conference between Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 after Mr. Hoover was defeated. But the two were not at all cordial, and the meeting was unproductive.

When Mr. Hoover took over from Calvin Coolidge in 1929, the problems of the United States seemed relatively easy, and there were no important consultations. Mr. Hoover had served as Secretary of Commerce in Coolidge's Cabinet, but there was personal friction between the two at the end.

Earlier, in 1921, when Warren Harding took over after eight years of Woodrow Wilson's Administration, there was no consultation whatsoever. Mr. Wilson had suffered a stroke, and the only conversation between the two men was when they drove behind a team of horses from the White House to the Capitol.

When Mr. Truman took over from Mr. Roosevelt in 1945, it was after the latter's tragic death at Warm Springs, and of course there had been no opportunity to consult. Likewise with Mr. Johnson when he assumed office after the death of President Kennedy in Dallas.

"I had two minutes to get ready for this job," Mr. Johnson told members of his staff. "Mr. Nixon has from November almost to the end of January, and I want to give him all the help we can."

Misunderstanding

Nixon has appreciated this offer of help, and the slight misunderstanding which arose last week over who is responsible for foreign policy has not disrupted relations between the two men. The misunderstanding arose when Secretary of State Dean Rusk was about to leave for Brussels and wanted to invite the leaders of NATO to attend a 20th anniversary celebration of NATO in Washington next year. Because Nixon then would be President, Mr. John-

son decided he could not issue the invitation without clearing it with the President-elect, which he did.

During their historic luncheon meeting, the President suggested to the President-elect that he find himself a Director of the Budget Bureau as soon as possible so they could work together on the new budget. He also hoped that the Secretaries of State and Defense might be picked so that he could instruct his corresponding Cabinet members to work with them. He considered these two Cabinet posts the most vital.

The President and President-elect spent considerable time going over the very important problems of American-Soviet relations. The President emphasized his conviction that the Non-Proliferation Pact was all important. He was afraid that, if not ratified soon, the pact would lose momentum and erosion would set in.

Agreement on Russia

Nixon heartily concurred with Mr. Johnson's strategy on Russia. The Johnson policy has been that, if the two superpowers could work together, there could be permanent peace. Nixon, who made one trip to Russia during the Eisenhower Administration and another as a private citizen, agreed.

The President outlined to Nixon the various steps he had taken to secure Russian co-

operation, and the fact that he had an agreement for a meeting with Premier Kosygin, which was to be announced on Aug. 21, but which was upset by the invasion of Czechoslovakia on Aug. 20.

The President expressed the hope that the Soviet Union might iron out its problems with Czechoslovakia to a point where a meeting with Kosygin still might be possible, and that, if this should happen, the President-elect might send a representative with him to Europe.

A good part of the conferences between the two men dealt with Vietnam and the truce negotiations. Mr. Johnson went into this in great detail, particularly his discouragements during the summer, when various people had made political speeches cutting the ground from under the Paris negotiations. This on-again, off-again aspect of the talks had been disheartening. It made the North Vietnamese think they could get an end to the bombing without making concessions. Nixon had been reasonably familiar with this from previous briefings. He remained convinced of Mr. Johnson's sincerity.

After the luncheon, Mr. Johnson remarked to an aide that he was convinced every man who became President tried to grow tall in the job. Nixon, he said, would be no exception.